



inps journal

Indiana Native Plant Society

Spring 2026

Twin Swamps Nature Preserve: A Piece of the Deep South

**By John Bacone and
Mike Homoya**

Cypress swamps once covered several thousand acres in five counties in southwest Indiana. This must have been something to see! In 1876, pioneering ornithologist Robert Ridgway

noted that he found stumps measuring 9 and 10 feet across in the cutover stand known as Little Cypress Swamp in Knox County. By the time the Division of Nature Preserves (DNP) was established in 1967, most cypress stands had been timbered, cleared, drained, and converted to agriculture. The best-known remaining stand, at Hovey Lake Fish and Wildlife Area in Posey County, had been permanently inundated after a lock and dam was installed nearby on the Ohio River. It was no longer functioning as a natural area. Prior to its inundation, it must have been an incredible natural

area, loaded with rare plant species.

Bill Barnes, the first Director of the Division of Nature Preserves, had tried to acquire one of the best remaining cypress stands, known as Gray's Cypress Slough. It was owned by the Gray Estate, and soon after he contacted them, the stand was logged and oil wells were installed, diminishing its natural quality.

In 1978, DNP contracted Don Kurz, who worked with the Natural Land Institute, to conduct an inventory to find and assess Indiana's remaining cypress stands. DNP wanted to learn which of the remaining stands had high

natural quality. Don Kurz reviewed the literature, examined topographic maps, and then flew the area in his Cessna 172. He chose an early November date, when cypress tree needles had turned rusty-brown in color, making the trees easy to spot. His flight took him over the White and Patoka Rivers, including old meander scars and backwater sloughs, and over all previously known cypress stands. The survey encompassed 80 potential cypress locations. Of these, seven had been previously known: three in Knox County, and four in Posey County. Only two previously unknown cypress stands were located – one in Vanderburg County and one in Posey

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County. On the flight, he found that of the original 2,000-3,000 acres of cypress in Little Cypress Swamp, only 200 acres remained, and it was heavily disturbed.

Don Kurz submitted his report to DNP on January 19, 1979. The happy, unexpected outcome of his survey was the discovery of what he called the "Unnamed Cypress Slough" in Posey County. He recommended follow-up field work to determine which of the three remaining cypress stands, Gray's Woods, Goose Pond, or Unnamed Cypress Slough, should be protected. Since Gray's had been

Twin Swamps — continued on page 2



*Division of Nature
Preserves Ecologist
Cloyce Hedge on
site at Twin Swamps
in 1982.*

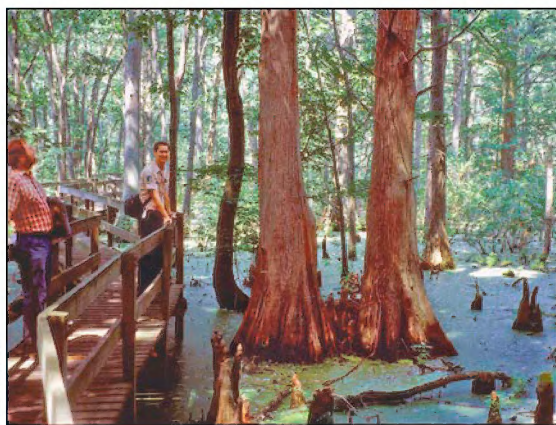
Mike Homoya

Twin Swamps — continued from front

Featherfoil (*Hottonia inflata*), a rare native species of southern Indiana, graces Twin Swamps in April and May.



Rich Hull



Paul Rothrock

Thanks to an excellent boardwalk installed by the DNP's Southwestern Indiana Regional Ecologist, Brian Abrell, and nicely maintained by his successor Ryan Keller, visitors can see the interior of the swamp easily and with dry feet. The two visitors (from 1999) are Tony Reznicek and Mike Homoya.

logged and had new oil wells, and since Goose Pond (subsequently protected by The Nature Conservancy, TNC) was fairly small in size, DNP and Indiana Natural Heritage Program (INHP) staff decided to look carefully at the Unnamed Cypress Slough, a 20-acre cypress swamp holding more than 150 cypress trees.

Several years later, on May 7, 1982, Cloyce Hedge, Mike Homoya, and Jim Aldrich, biologists with the INHP, accompanied by noted sedge expert Helene Starcs, in their blue jeans and tennis shoes, waded into the cypress swamp. They were delighted by what they found. Because the swamp was located on a terrace of the Ohio River, as opposed to being in the Ohio River floodplain, it didn't

receive the heavy silt loads deposited every time the Ohio River flooded. Hence, it had retained a high natural quality. They found numerous rare and unusual plants as they slowly moved among the cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), and swamp cottonwood (*Populus heterophylla*) trees. Among these were featherfoil (*Hottonia inflata*) bobbing on the surface of the water. Yellow-crowned night herons (*Nyctanassa*

violacea) launched from a snag in a cypress tree. On subsequent visits to the site, they found time to explore an additional slough on the property

that was dominated by overcup oak (*Quercus lyrata*). A high-quality southern flatwoods natural community occupied the ground in between these two sloughs. Interesting and rare plants were also located, including social sedge (*Carex socialis*), Louisiana sedge (*C. louisianica*), spider lily (*Hymenocallis occidentalis*), and Kentucky wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*).

Because there are two swamps found in this large (620 acre) high-quality natural area, Mike Homoya named it the "Twin Swamps Natural Area." The site was nominated to the Natural Areas Registry. Registry Director Paul Carmony found out that it was owned by Oakland City College. It had been given to them many years ago by Nellie and Jacob Cronbach, to be cleared and drained and used for agriculture, while keeping some of the ground in permanent forest for timber production. Paul Carmony, Registry Director, met with Oakland City College President Dr. James Murray. Their Board of Governors agreed to sell the property, enabling it to be protected as a state nature preserve. TNC acquired 517 acres on February 10, 1986, and sold it to DNP on June 10, 1987. The \$229,719 came from the Indiana Natural Heritage Protection Campaign. An additional 80 acres was acquired on September 29, 1989. Oakland City College also had oil rights on the property, due to the presence of several active wells. For an additional \$86,253 we were able to acquire those rights, and work towards restoring the land damaged by oil production.

A public dedication ceremony was held on Saturday, April 25, 1987, as part of the Southwest Indiana Natural Areas Conference and Field Days, held at the Thrall Opera House in New Harmony, Indiana. The on-site dedication ceremony was MC'd by DNP Director John Bacone, with remarks by Indiana Department of Natural Resources Director Jim Ridenour, and TNC Director Bill Weeks. Father Damien Schmelz gave the benediction. The spectacular Twin Swamps was Indiana's 150th dedicated state nature preserve.

The preserve entrance is located at Raben Road south of CR 1400S, Mt. Vernon, Indiana (37.832636, -87.984049).

John and Mike, both members of the Central Chapter of INPS, retired after distinguished service with the Indiana Division of Nature Preserves.

AC2025 Bur Oak Sponsors

We thank the many sponsors who helped support the INPS 2025 Annual Conference and made it a success. Here are the two designated as Bur Oak Level sponsors.



Sanctuary Native Nursery

What started as an alternative to traditional landscaping has grown into a comprehensive native plant nursery, design firm, and educational space dedicated to restoring Indiana's ecological heritage. Visit their 6-acre ecological campus (with displays gardens and a new oak savanna restoration) during the growing season at 8920 Aboite Rd, Roanoke, Indiana. www.sanctuarynativenursery.com



The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy of Indiana (TNC) has protected more than 100,000 acres in the state (<https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/indiana/>). Last year, Douglas Woods Nature Preserve in Steuben County was expanded by 265 acres for a total of 1635 acres. New visitor opportunities will open this summer.

Hickory sponsors include: Butler University, Laura Stine Gardens, Ruth Ann Ingraham, Tom Hohman, Indiana Medical History Museum & Medicinal Plant Garden, Spence Restoration Nursery, Eco Logic, and Wild Birds Unlimited. Other sponsors include: Zelonis Cultural Excursions, Friends of the Sands, Blue Fox Farms, Amy Perry, Mader Design, and Christine Carlson. 🌿

State Flower Initiative Stalls

By Tom Hohman

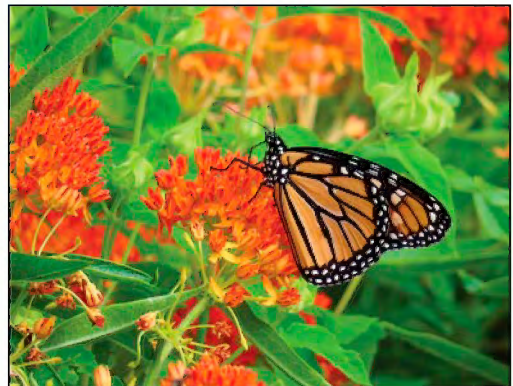
It was always going to be a tough road for passage of the bill to change the state flower in the 2026 legislative session. Controversial and divisive issues made co-operative bills rare. However, INPS did have a state senator lined up to introduce the bill, with the intent of at least using the session as an educational opportunity.

The initiative (detailed in the fall 2025 issue of INPS Journal) was dealt a huge setback when the state senator changed his mind at the last minute and decided not to introduce the bill. This left us scrambling to try to find another sponsoring legislator. Unfortunately, it was too late. Legislators who might have been receptive to introducing it declined because they were limited to a total of five bills each.

In preparation for the session, over 55 state and local organizations had endorsed the initiative to change the state flower from the non-native peony (*Paeonia* sp.) to the butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*). INPS will continue to add to that list of supporters and also plans to develop a list of businesses favoring the initiative. All of this will be done with the intent to introduce a bill in the 2027 legislative session, with multiple legislators primed to introduce it, to protect against a repeat of the experience this year.

The full list of supporting organizations can be found at <https://indiananativeplants.org/2025/lets-change-the-indiana-state-flower/>. If your organization wants to be added, or you have a business that wants to be part of that new list, contact Tom Hohman at stateflower@indiananativeplants.org.

Tom Hohman, a member of the Central Chapter of INPS and a past president, chairs the State Flower Committee.



*Butterfly milkweed, as its name implies, attracts a wide variety of lepidopterans, including monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*).*

Fred Wooley

Groundwater Dependent

By Tony Fleming

What do Indiana wetlands such as fens and seepage swamps have in common with desert oases, thermal springs, pocosins, and even some caves? Superficially, it might not seem like much, but they are all examples of groundwater dependent ecosystems (GWDE) that support unique natural communities. Found in every biome on Earth except high latitude polar regions with deep permafrost or thick ice caps, GWDE are well documented biodiversity hotspots, often hosting plants, animals, and sometimes entire ecosystems, found nowhere else. Yellowstone's thermal springs, for example, support thermophilic microbes that metabolize sulfur, silicon, and other elements dissolved in the boiling hot groundwater to produce dazzling mineral displays. Meanwhile, at least 26 endemic species thrive at Ash Meadows, the largest oasis in the Mojave Desert, including the Devil's Hole pupfish, which lives only in a single spring, and a long list of endemic plants with names like spring-loving centaury (*Zeltnera nemophila*), Ash Meadows sunray (*Enciliopsis nudicaulis* var. *corrugata*), and Ash Meadows ladies tresses (*Spiranthes infernalis*). Indiana also hosts a remarkable range of GWDE with distinctive floral and faunal assemblages. Here, we highlight fens and seepage swamps, end members on a

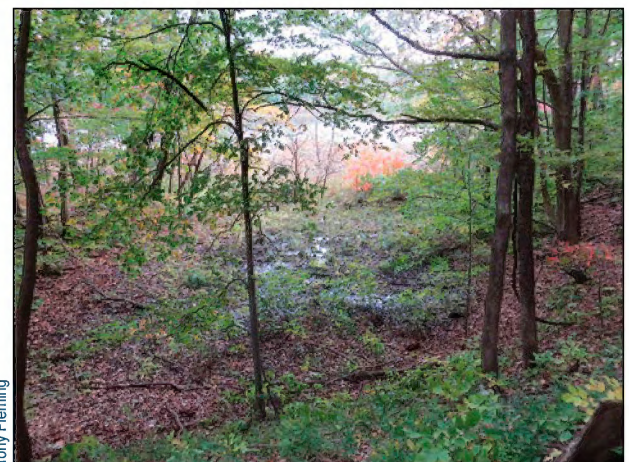
spectrum of wetlands known as groundwater slope wetlands.

In simple terms, groundwater is defined as all water below the water table, while GWDE mark springs where groundwater emerges in sufficient volumes to influence the species composition of the ecosystem. Put differently, the physical, chemical, and thermal characteristics of groundwater are responsible for the distinctive biology that sets GWDE apart from their surroundings. Physically, GWDE are wet places: the longer the soil remains waterlogged or inundated (its hydroperiod), the greater the effect on ecosystems and the more likely trees and shrubs are absent. Groundwater also carries dissolved minerals that affect soil and water chemistry around springs – and the more extreme the chemistry, the more unique the plant life. Finally, because groundwater maintains a constant temperature, GWDE favor thermophiles – organisms whose life cycles depend on the latent heat released by groundwater.

Groundwater slope wetlands occur anywhere a slope intersects a water-bearing formation, such as sand and gravel, fractured bedrock, or cavernous limestone; the resulting interface between land surface and aquifer creates a spring, which may have a distinct orifice or be expressed as a more diffuse seepage face. As a general rule, small, localized aquifers



Grasses and grass-like plants dominate the raised central part of this small alkaline fen, while tamaracks and poison sumac grow where peat has accumulated further outboard.



This seepage swamp occupies a recess in a lake bluff. Higher ground on three sides focuses the flow of groundwater inward to the spring visible near the center of the image.

Ecosystems: Biodiversity Hotspots

produce low-volume, intermittent springs that may support vegetation only modestly different from adjacent areas, whereas large, regionally extensive aquifers support expansive perennial springs that discharge thousands of gallons per minute and support spectacular GWDE covering hundreds of acres, such as those at Pigeon River Fish and Wildlife Area. Slope shape also plays a key role. Long, concave slopes act like a bowl, directing the flow of groundwater inward towards a common point. This process, known as groundwater focusing, amplifies the biological effects of groundwater discharge by concentrating the flow and extending the hydroperiod of a given wetland.

Ecologically, Indiana's fens and seepage swamps are distinguished primarily by vegetation structure: The former are essentially grasslands, while the latter are forested. This distinction is commonly associated with differences in groundwater chemistry: fens are alkaline due to the deposition of tufa (calcium carbonate, or limestone) by the emerging, mineral-bearing groundwater, while seepage swamps feature strongly acidic to circumneutral chemistry and deposition of iron oxides mediated by iron

bacteria. Both can exhibit seasonal variations in groundwater levels, and both commonly accumulate peat derived from mosses or sedges.

The peat found in fens and seepage swamps is acidic. As a result, as peat accumulates in a fen it can create a complex mosaic of acidic and alkaline substrates that amplifies biodiversity. Fens may be the only places one can find acid-loving sphagnum moss and poison sumac (*Toxicodendron vernix*) growing next to Ohio goldenrod (*Solidago ohioensis*) and grass of Parnassus (*Parnassia glauca*), both of which inhabit strongly alkaline substrates.

Having defined fen versus seepage swamp, one should realize that in reality these community types are endpoints in a continuum of plant communities. GWDE vary in their chemistry, in the persistence of moisture, and in the amount of tree and shrub cover. Perhaps not surprisingly, this diversity has led to an array of regional names for these ecosystems and inconsistency in their application (some seepage swamps in the southeastern US, for example, have historically been called "poor fens"). What is undisputed, however, is that all these groundwater slope wetlands are



P. Rothrock

Left:

White lady's slipper (Cypripedium candidum) is among the many conservative species closely associated with the wet, alkaline conditions found in rich fens.

Right:

This marl run has tufa deposits that are toxic for most plants. Nonetheless several tolerant species of sedges and rushes grow here. One also finds calciphiles such as Indian-plaintain, grass-of-Parnassus, shining lady's-tresses (Spiranthes lucida), and Ohio goldenrod.



P. Rothrock

Groundwater — continued on page 7

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Nature Trails: Uncommon Tree, Bald Cypress, Has Unique Features

By Harold Allison

Top: Harold Allison, here at 84 years old, believed he roamed in God's creation; thus, he wanted to preserve as much of it as possible.

Bottom: Bald cypress bears spherical seed cones and deciduous clusters of needle-like leaves.

Editor's Note: Over the years, I recall frequently spotting a nature column in Indiana newspapers written by Harold Allison. I saved one such column, featuring bald cypress, that appeared in the Bloomington Herald-Times on September 19, 2020.

Although Allison died in 2024 at the age of 87, his legacy lives on. His Nature Trails column was the longest running syndicated column in Indiana. He worked tirelessly, in cooperation with The Nature Conservancy (he was a lifetime member) and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, to preserve biologically and geologically important sites. Allison is said to have had a role in preserving 50,000 acres, especially in southwestern Indiana near his home in Daviess County. The director of Indiana's Division of Nature Preserves, Ron Hellmich, said that "in essence, he is part of Indiana's nature preserve system." And all this from a man who did not seek a college degree, opting instead to work on the family farm for 15 years before gaining employment for 30 years with the US Postal Service. He understood the importance of community, nature, and history as

evidenced by his long association with the Pleasant Hill United Methodist Church in Washington, Indiana and his service as president of the Daviess County Historical Society. Think about this beloved man as you read what he had to say about bald cypress or read more about him in the July/August 2021 issue of Outdoor Indiana magazine.

In a past column [September 6, 2020] I listed the bald cypress as one of the uncommon trees native to Indiana. I wrote so much about where it is found in our state that I ran out of space before I could describe what helps make this tree so interesting. One reason is it can thrive in a very wet habitat and another is it can live to a really old age. Some large old trees are believed to be nearly 1,000 years of age with one estimated to be at least 1,622 years old — and it's still alive.

One of the older cypress trees is in what is known as the Little Cypress Swamp in southern Knox County. Over the years it has had to deal with storms, disease, and even fire. A few years ago someone built a fire inside this now-hollow based tree and set its interior on fire. While battered and bruised like many of us, it was still alive the last time I saw it last year. In addition to long life, a bald cypress can grow to huge proportions. Several in the past were reported to be more than 17 feet in diameter, but most of these very large trees are now gone, cut for lumber or to make way for some people's development. One giant still around is in Oaxaca, Mexico. It has a trunk diameter of 35 1/2 feet, is still alive and apparently in good health.

One curious feature of bald cypress is what we call knees. These are often found near an old cypress and extend up to several feet in height and are rather strange looking with no limbs and smooth bark. They often surround the tree like they are part of its family. There are several reasons given for these knees but they probably help to anchor the tree in its watery habitat or act in aeration for its root system. Down South, some gift shops make lamps or other ornaments for tourists to take home out of cypress wood. My mother once bought one, and we had it around for several years. What ever happened to that knee lamp?

Bald cypress is listed as an evergreen tree or conifer. It does have needle-like leaves but they turn brown in autumn and fall from the tree. New ones sprout each spring. So, technically it is not correct to say bald cypress is evergreen. The bark of a cypress is reddish brown in color and has shallow furrows on the trunk of young trees. However,

Cypress — continued at right

John Maxwell



P. Rothrock



Groundwater — continued from page 5

populated by conservative plant species, most of which tolerate specific hydrological and chemical extremes.

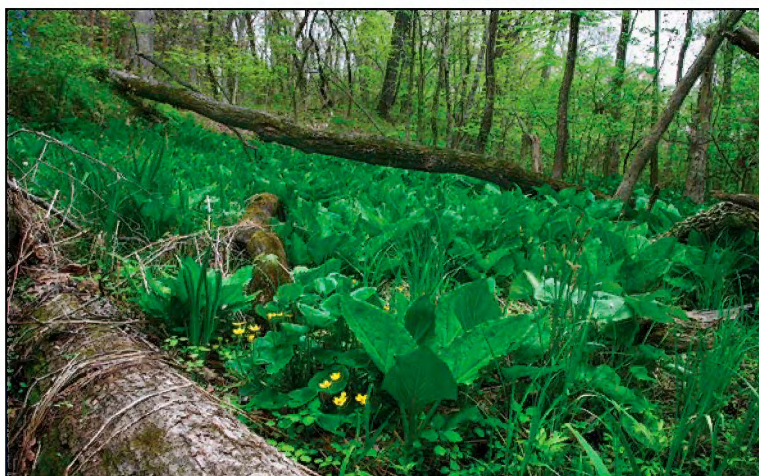
Many of Indiana's fens are fed by groundwater rich in calcium carbonates. While low levels of minerals such as calcium are essential for vigorous plants, at high concentrations they can limit plant growth, or even become toxic. The fen as a whole may be resplendent with calciphiles, i.e., plants that thrive where calcium levels are high. But often these same fens have areas called marl flats where deposits of tufa are evident. Here only the hardiest of calciphiles grow, including some sedges (*Carex* spp.), rushes (*Juncus* spp.), and more showy species such as grass-of-Parnassus, Ohio goldenrod, Indian-plantain (*Amoglossum plantagineum*), and Kalm's lobelia (*Lobelia kalmii*).

While the concept of thermophilic organisms evokes geothermally active places like Yellowstone and Ash Meadows, it also applies to Midwestern GWDE. Groundwater below Indiana maintains a

constant temperature of ~55 °F. Hence, it has a moderating effect on the microclimates of GWDE, the net effect being to extend the growing season for cold-tolerant plants and reduce it for heat-loving plants. One common denizen of GWDE, skunk cabbage, takes its thermal environment one step forward. It not only enjoys the extended growing season offered by the more uniform temperatures of its habitat, but, especially at the time of flowering, generates its own heat through rapid cellular respiration.



Gary P. Fleming



P. Rothrock

Cypress — continued from left

as the tree ages, the bark becomes fibrous and rather shaggy in appearance. The wood from a cypress is somewhat soft, light in weight and is very resistant to decay.

While not evergreen, bald cypress clearly is a conifer: the fruit of the cypress is a globe shaped, one-inch cone that contains paired seeds and are unique in appearance.

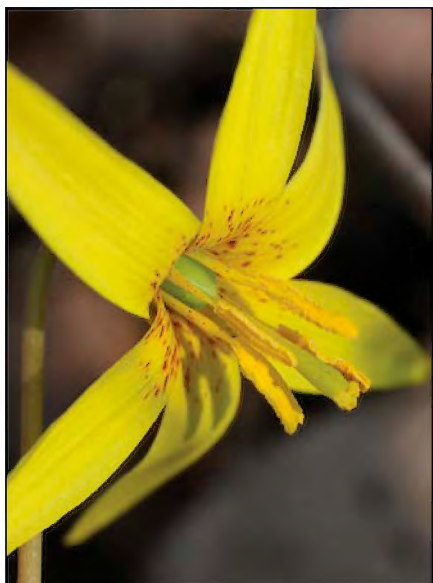
In the past bald cypress has been used for lumber for vats, barrels, railroad ties, and in bridge construction. Today, few if any are cut for use as lumber. One reason may be that most of the remaining large old trees are now protected in nature preserves. The bald cypress, now an uncommon segment of our Hoosier flora and only native to a few counties in southwestern Indiana, remains nonetheless a vivid example of our rich natural heritage. 🌿

GWDE have suffered the same abuses as other wetlands in Indiana, notably artificial drainage, grazing, and conversion to other uses. Rare to begin with, they are much less common today than before European settlement, and many that remain are degraded. But every GWDE is vulnerable to a more insidious threat – groundwater depletion. The threat is real – increasingly erratic rainfall combined with overpumping and development in recharge areas is causing groundwater levels to fall in parts of Indiana. The groundwater that supports GWDE typically recharges at some distance off site. As a result, saving these unique biodiversity hotspots for posterity requires land managers to think beyond simply protecting the small parcel of land they sit on.

Tony Fleming, a member of the Northeast Chapter of INPS, is a hydrogeologist.

Skunk cabbage is a frequent denizen of groundwater slope wetlands, forming colonies that correspond closely to the dimensions of the springs they occur in. The inflorescence consists of a thick hood (spathe) surrounding the flowering organ (spadix). The hood traps heat released by the plant itself. Temperatures within the hood can reach 50 degrees or higher, enabling skunk cabbage to flower and attract pollinators in late winter.

Yellow Dog-Tooth Violet:



P. Rothrock

This flower has yellow anthers and pollen in addition to its graceful yellow tepals. Notice that the flower pictured below has red pollen. Barley says the red-pollen form is most common in his neighborhood and wonders what you see in yours.

By Barley Coopersmith

I love winter! My thick fur keeps me plenty warm and the coolness of snow on my belly provides a soothing feeling after a nice kibble breakfast. But my pet Karin does not like winter as much. So, although I get time to play in the snow in my backyard, the explorations of the neighborhood are limited. I get starved for olfactory messages from my friends and non-canine critters.

Finally, with the coming of spring, we began taking long outings to Cascade Park on the north side of Bloomington. For a city park, it is rich with mature trees along the creek and on the woody slopes. Over several visits I took note of some of the species — there not only is sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), my favorite message tree, but also sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*)

with its exfoliating bark, hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*) with its marvelously warty bark, and white oak (*Quercus alba*) with its pale flaky bark. Our first visit this spring was on a cool, sunny morning. Karin told me to “heel” on my leash, but it was hard, especially as we ventured up a woodland path toward the sound of the waterfall. Thanks to snow melt and recent spring rain, the waterfall was sparkling both to see and to hear.

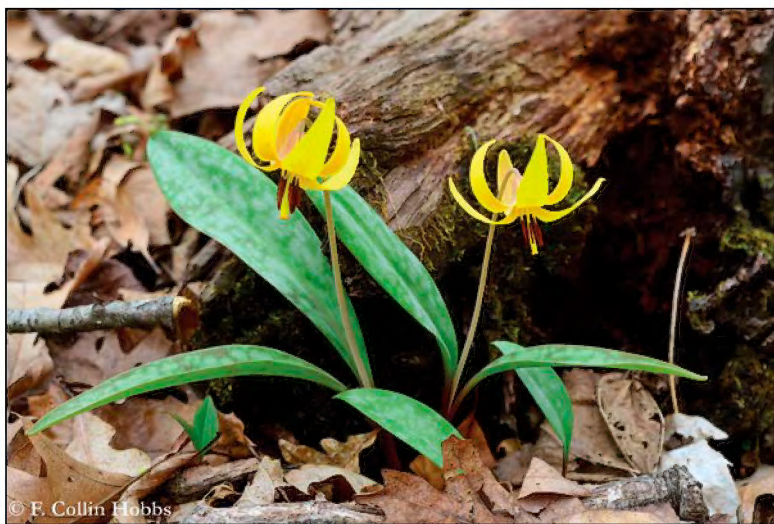
Near the waterfall we encountered rather large brightly colored flowers — yellow dog-tooth violet (*Erythronium americanum*). This spring ephemeral of the lily family (Liliaceae) is common in most of Indiana. According to the Chicago flora, though, they are infrequent in the northwestern part of the state. Instead, the white dog-tooth violet (*E. albidum*) is more common there.

On sunny days, dog-tooth violet blooms spread their 3 cm long tepals into a recurved, flaring array, but shyly close them again by evening. I don’t know why. Karin doesn’t either. Since their anthers are down at my level, I noticed that the pollen comes in different colors. Sometimes it is red, sometimes yellow. Again, I don’t know why, and Karin doesn’t either.

But what I do know is that the leaves vary in number from one to two per plant. The plants with flowers have two leaves, one wider than the other. Non-flowering plants have only one leaf. As is typical, the colony of dog-tooth violets at Cascade Park had many single-leaf individuals compared to those with two.

The upper surface of the leaves has a brownish mottled look, unlike the totally green lower surface. This coloration leads some folks to call this species yellow trout-lily thinking that the pattern resembles that seen on trout moving through water. The white-flowered species also has mottled leaves, but with the mottling visible on both sides.

Karin and I sat for a time near the waterfall. She had to encourage me to stay put and not go running into the mud and water. That would make the trip home awkward. It was good for me to meditate



F. Collin Hobbs

The leaves on a flowering yellow dog-tooth violet come in pairs. Also notice the brown mottling on the upper leaf surface. The white dog-tooth violet has mottling on both sides of its leaves.

A Canine's Perspective

more on those yellow flowers. When Karin excavated a fleshy bulb from the ground I finally got to see why it is dog-tooth violet. That bulb has the shape of one of my big teeth! Still, the violet part is mysterious, since my botanist friend Eric told me that they are not at all related to true violets.

As Karin continued to enjoy the sound of the waterfall, I watched the insects buzzing around. Lots of different bees came. I was fortunate to spot among them the miner bee (*Andrena erythronii*). Again, the Chicago flora had something to say, noting that this bee species is "oligolectic." All that means is that it specializes in collecting pollen from dog-tooth violets and their relatives.

Being a tactile being and a lover of doggie treats, I next considered the question of what does this plant taste like. I have a fondness for chewing on grass and thought the leaves looked particularly juicy. Karin was not pleased at my interest! She said that, according to her Pet Poison Hotline, they might give me an upset tummy. Maybe she was erring on the side of caution since humans have been known to use them as a potherb. Then again, true lilies (*Lilium* spp.) and daylilies (*Hemerocallis* sp.) can cause kidney failure and lily-of-the-valley (*Convallaria majalis*) has chemicals that are bad for a puppy's heart.

My pet and I returned to Cascade Park multiple times this spring. Over two weeks the flowers gave way to capsule fruits that lay on the ground. One afternoon we again took up our meditation spot near the waterfall. And then I spotted something really cool!. One of the fruits had split open revealing rather sizable seeds with a bulbous swelling on one edge. Next thing I knew an ant came along and carried away one of the seeds. I asked my friend Eric about this and he laid the word myrmecochorous on me. I thought he had sneezed and so barked my best wish for good health at him. It turns out that the word means that ants carry the seeds to their nest and feed on the swollen stuff on the edge of the seed.

I hope Karin will take me back to Cascade Park all through the year. In addition to

enjoying the sights of spring-ephemeral plants, sounds of water, and smells of spring, I want to go wade in the stream and chase squirrels. More adventures await!

Barley is a six-year old Bernese Mountain dog who resides in south central Indiana. He received his education at "Scout's Honor" puppy school in Bloomington Indiana.



These fleshy bulbs on younger, non-flowering plants have a shape that reminds some of a dog's tooth.



*The yellowish seed of dog-tooth violet is about to be carried off to its nest by a field ant (*Formica* sp.). The white, fleshy tissue on the edge of the seed, known as an elaiosome, is an attractive food source.*

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To promote the appreciation, preservation, scientific study, and use of plants native to Indiana.

To teach people about their beauty, diversity, and importance to our environment.

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The INPS Grow Indiana Natives Certification Program

By Heidi Gray

Native Garden

Congratulations: you're committed to changing your garden or yard from just a ho-hum lawn and non-native plant garden to an environment that attracts and benefits wildlife. You've done your research to find out about soil conditions, sun or shade, and which native plants will thrive in the areas you have decided to transform. You've prepared these areas for planting. You've scattered seeds or planted plugs or young native plants in these areas. You've watched them grow and enjoyed observing native wildlife feeding from the plants or making their homes in them.

Now you can join the hundreds of other Indiana citizens who have received certification through the INPS Grow Indiana Natives committee. The process is simple. On the INPS website go to the 'Grow Indiana Natives Certification Program.' There you will find an application that simply requires your contact information, a list of the native plants you are growing, up to three photos of your native plants, and acknowledging that you are removing any invasive plants in your yard. Once approved you will receive a certificate via email and the opportunity to purchase a sign for your yard. The sign will let others know that your garden has been certified and may also encourage them to get certified. And, by the way, those who are not members of INPS can participate in each aspect of the Grow Indiana Natives program, but we certainly wish to encourage nonmembers to join!

Native Plant Sellers

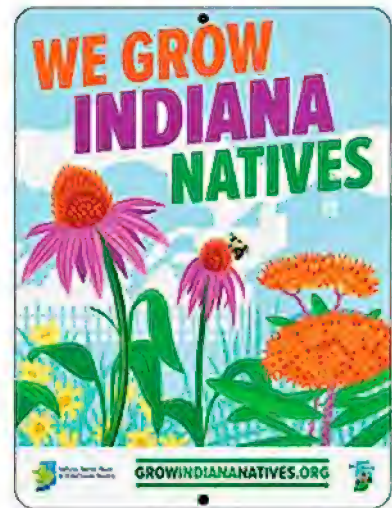
Native plant sellers can also be certified. This category includes nurseries, fundraisers, and annual sales. There are two categories: Basic, which are businesses that sell some native plants and other plants, and Invasive-Free in which the seller does sell native plants and agrees to not sell invasive plants. The benefit of enrolling is that your business is included in the *Buy Natives Directory* located on the INPS website.

Designers

Many homeowners or businesses prefer to utilize the expertise of a professional designer for their native plant landscape. Designers that include native plants in their designs are encouraged to become certified. The designs can include non-native plants, but not invasive plants. Designers are also included in the *Buy Natives Directory*.

Buy Natives Directory

The *Buy Natives Directory* lists native plant nurseries, annual sales, and designers that have been certified by the Grow Indiana Natives committee. It includes an interactive map showing where these businesses are in the state. This is a great resource for finding a business near you that sells the plants you are looking for or for help in designing your native landscape.



Heidi Gray, a member of the North Chapter of INPS, leads the Grow Indiana Natives certification program.



This lovely Grow Indiana Natives certified garden includes sundrops (Oenothera sp.), Ohio spiderwort (Tradescantia ohioensis), and beardtongue (Penstemon sp.), as well as Joe-pye-weed (Eutrochium fistulosum) and phlox (Phlox paniculata).

P. Rothrock

Florathon Teams Explore

By Jennifer Ehara

After becoming an INPS member I was intrigued by the Florathon articles I read each year in the newsletters and hoped to make my own team one day. That eventually happened in 2025, when I was able to make two teams in Columbus, Indiana. My goal of forming Florathon teams was to give my friends a chance to connect more closely with the natural areas where they live. It was a great experience, and I am writing this article in the hopes that my story will encourage more INPS members to try a Florathon in your area in 2026!

I was not familiar with the topography of the county before doing the Florathons, and researching that made the experience more fulfilling. Columbus is located in Bartholomew County in the south central part of Indiana and has unique topography, as I'm sure all counties do! The center of the county is a flat and narrow tillplain, with multiple glacial till rivers flowing through and meeting in the south of the county to form the East Fork of White River. The west of the county rises steeply in elevation to form the easternmost point of the Norman Uplands Region. The east side of the county rises toward the

Dearborn Upland Region.

My Florathon spots were both in the Norman Uplands region of the county, and were only 2 miles apart, but offered differing floral species.

The site for the Grandview Team was under the dam at Grandview Lake at the source of the East Fork of White Creek. The Grandview Lake HOA had recently received an America the Beautiful (ATB) grant to restore 15 acres below the dam which had been fully cleared and bulldozed when the dam was constructed in the late 1950s. It has since "returned to nature," meaning it was a mess of invasives. We had many successful community SICIM Weed Wrangles¹ in the ATB acreage, bringing neighbors together with a goal to create a natural area for all to share and explore. Riding this wave of enthusiasm, I wanted to collect community members to record the flowers blooming in the ATB acreage that had been cleared of invasives and allowed to grow after decades of mowing. Although we got sidelined by multiple storms, including a T2 tornado and incessant rain, we were able to get a baseline native flowering plant inventory, allowing us to record the return

Below-right:

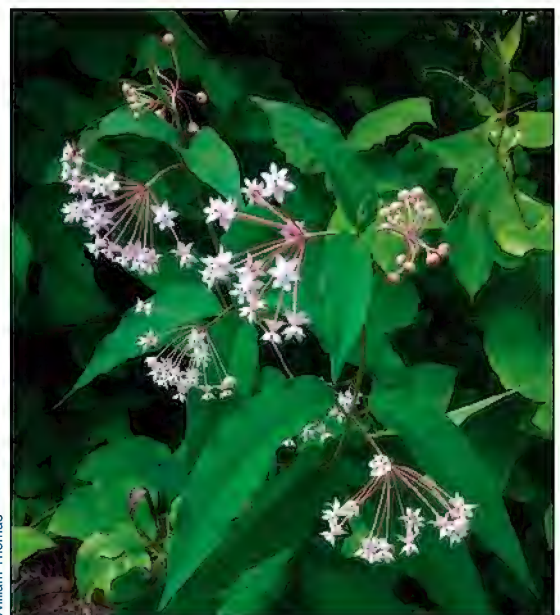
Four-leaved milkweed was spotted at the Youth Camp. In Indiana, the Norman Upland region is where you are most likely to find this species.

Below-left:

A springtime view of the area below Grandview Lake: it has served as a site for Weed Wrangles and Florathon. The 2025 Florathon effort netted several dozen native species in an area recently reclaimed from invasives.



J. Ehara



William Thomas

Bartholomew County

of native flowers to the restored area. I was able to publish our findings in the community newsletter, hopefully raising awareness and interest among residents.

The Newcomers Florathon team collected data in the Columbus Youth Camp, which is an area of both regrowth forest and heavily altered acreage, including recent logging. Although the two spots are only a couple miles apart, the Youth Camp is high atop the Uplands hills while the Grandview Lake dam is perhaps 300 feet lower at the foot of the Uplands. We found many similar species, and many differing ones too. My favorites from Youth Camp were yellow star-grass (*Hypoxis hirsuta*) and four-leaved milkweed (*Asclepias quadrifolia*), and my favorite from Grandview Lake was green dragon (*Arisaema dracontium*).

As winter closes out and rain invites spring ephemerals, I will be back at the Grandview Dam ATB area to look for new native species peeking out from the areas cleared of invasives. I am grateful for the opportunities through SICIM Weed Wrangles and INPS

Florathon to bring my community outdoors. In the process, my neighbors and I learn about invasive species remediation and see the native plants growing back in the remediated areas. To say the least, the cause and effect of this cycle is very satisfying!

Jennifer Ehara, a member of the South Central Chapter of INPS, lives in the Norman Upland region of Bartholomew County, Indiana.

¹ Weed Wrangles is a program sponsored by SICIM, State of Indiana Cooperative Invasive Management (<https://sicim.info/>).

Get ready for Florathon 2026!

Florathon 2026 runs from April 1 through May 31.

Get your team together now and start planning: give yourselves a name, solicit sponsors, and plan your route through Indiana's natural areas to spot flowers in bloom!

Donations go to the INPS Facilitator Fund, which supports leadership that furthers the mission of INPS, including citizen scientist conservation projects.



P. Rothrock



P. Rothrock

Left:

Yellow star-grass, an infrequent species in south central Indiana, was observed at the Florathon's Youth Camp site.

Right:

Among the dramatic native species at Grandview Dam is green dragon, a member of the Arum family.

Getting the Word Out: The Rogue Rose

By Sophie Hartley

Before Hoosiers found multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*) to be a thorn in their side, unsuspecting land managers planted the species widely across Indiana — sometimes even at the behest of the federal government. The plant, now considered an invasive species, forms dense, prickly thickets, so the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) encouraged states to plant it as a hedge against erosion during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Multiflora rose grew in popularity: Indiana farmers planted it across their properties to fence in livestock, and homeowners decorated front lawns and backyards with this species, which bears dainty white flowers in late spring. Some transportation departments packed highway medians with the species to reduce headlight glare and cushion drivers against crashes.

Like many invasive species with enticing fruits, multiflora rose has since been spread widely across the state by hungry birds who nip at the plant's leathery rose hips, fly away with pieces and strew them miles away. Now, the invasive plant is just about everywhere. "We can see it growing along roadsides, forest edges, interior forests, old fields, and pastures. Basically anywhere," said Will Drews, a nursery inspector and compliance officer in the Indiana Department of Natural Resources's entomology division. "This

is one of the species that is throughout the entire state. You can find it in any county."

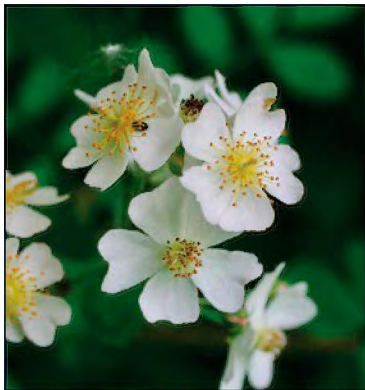
The brambly thickets of this invasive plant can grow up to 15 feet tall, especially by snaking up trees, and its large floppy stems often crowd and shade out nearby native plants, which can lose their foothold on the landscape.

Multiflora rose is also notorious for its bite. Drews noted that "the plant's stems have prominent barbs and wading through a sea of these prickles is not fun. On some Indiana landscapes, even a few DNR properties, the invasive plant has spread into areas hikers frequent. Wildlife and livestock, too, can be constricted by multiflora rose's aggressive takeover of Indiana farms and forests." Given its behavior and commonness, "It is considered one of the top three invasive plants in the state," Drews said.

Managing the beast: Intentionally growing multiflora rose is now highly restricted in Indiana; without a permit, it is illegal to buy, sell or move the species. Land managers and state officials like Drews are tasked with managing the damage that has already been done. We're "basically trying to undo the many years in the late 19th century where it was promoted and planted widely," he said. The USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program helps land managers fund brush management practices. In Indiana, applicants often use this money to remove multiflora rose, Drews

By the 1940s at least one Hoosier botanist was raising the alarm about the dangers of multiflora rose. His name was Charles Deam. Charlie said that the shrub's wild, pestlike personality canceled its benefits. He further dramatized his opinion in his own unique manner: "I understand they are strongly recommending that all the old cemeteries be planted with multiflora rose. When Gabriel sounds his horn, I am afraid some will be stranded and not be able to get thru the roses. Please do not recommend the multiflora rose except for the bonfire."

Rose — continued at right →



Multiflora rose has pretty flowers, but the plant has a "pestlike personality."



Unlike our native roses, the multiflora hip fruits are borne in an open, much-branched cluster.



At the base of the leaf, our native roses have a smooth-edged stipule. Notice that this one is fringed and has glandular hairs.

summer after the flush of spring leaves has died back.

Some of our plants were of interest at the state level. The rarest was one of the 14 fern species on our plant list: the least grapefern (*Botrychium simplex*). This tiny species only reaches to about 2 inches high and resembles a piece of spinach spaghetti with a small flake of basil stuck on one side. The State Botanist, Mike Homoya, confirmed the sighting and sent a sample to a specialist in Michigan who noted it was by far the southernmost record for the species in the Midwest. Our small colony grew and spread to nearby areas for 5-6 years, then began to decline, and eventually disappeared. I have no explanation for its sudden appearance or disappearance. I still check the area to see if it might reappear.

One “un-identification” lasted

6-7 years. Big green leaves came up in a rich bottom area each spring, starting as a small green triangle. Finally, one spring it produced purple-greenish flowers. It was Wood’s bunchflower (*Veratrum woodii*). Delano Arvin, the best amateur naturalist I ever met, lived 20 miles east of us and had the same unidentified leaves. I called, he checked, and his bunchflower was blooming too. We still have no idea what factors spur its flowering, but in the past 52 years the species has only bloomed three or four times.

Our love for this property led us to join the Sycamore Audubon Society (SAS). It wasn’t restricted to birds, but included plant hikes and general nature excursions. What I loved were the people. Everyone sought to share their knowledge. When Chris Brewster, a native plant stalwart, held a meeting to form a chapter of what was then INPAWS (now INPS), we signed up. INPS members share the same generosity of learning and friendship as SAS members. Perhaps the ultimate step in our personal journey with native plants was starting a local land trust: NICHES (“Northern Indiana Citizens Helping Ecosystems Survive”). The success and growth of this organization is one of the highlights in the life of my husband and me. That success wouldn’t have happened without the support of those who willingly served as board members, committee members, and property volunteers. NICHES now protects nearly 5,000 acres in Tippecanoe and surrounding counties. I am happy to report that our beloved 80+ acres will become their 80+ acres later this year so others can enjoy and learn from nature as we did.

Susan Ulrich is a member of the West Central Chapter of INPS.



P. Rothrock



Wood's bunchflower blooms sporadically from one year to the next. As a result, it took waiting for multiple years for Susan to identify this handsome native monocot.

Rose — continued from left

explained. “It is being controlled actively,” Drews added, but “it takes land owners, knowing the problem, to actively seek out that assistance in order to do it.”

To learn more about removing invasive species in Indiana, contact your regional specialist at the State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management (<https://sicim.info/>).

This article first appeared in the IndyStar (December 24, 2025). Sophie Hartley is an IndyStar environment reporter whose work receives the generous support of the nonprofit Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust. You can reach her at sophie.hartley@indystar.com or on X at @sophienhartley.



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Native Plants and Me: Footsteps from the Past to the Future



By Susan Ulrich

The best thing my husband and I did was to buy 80+ acres of 'wild' land in western Tippecanoe County in April 1974. There was a small house on adjacent land, and we bought that too. We had lived in an apartment in West Lafayette since moving to the state, so this was a major change. Summers, visiting and camping in national parks, forests, and wildlife areas out west inspired us. This was our own little natural area to explore and enjoy daily. And we did just that – learning about the area and the multitude of plants, birds, animals, insects, and fungi that we shared it with, including the invasive species we did our best to remove and control.

The earliest encounter with a native plant I recall occurred while walking to school. I was in 4th grade and that day I opted to take a narrow trail along a small bluff. My mother identified it from my description. She told me it was a Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*) and it was illegal to pick or dig them up in New York State. She was a city girl from the Bronx, but she and her sisters went to summer camps and she enjoyed volunteering in the extensive gardens of a friend of her mother. As a result, she usually knew any plant my sister or I encountered. Although most were non-native, it was fun finding something new. One I always enjoy is Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*). It is attractive in a bouquet and the roots taste like carrots. Since then I've spent hundreds of hours over a period of years removing it at NICHES Weiler-Leopold Nature Preserve (while apologizing to the plants I removed).

Susan frequently explores the changing seasons on her 80-acre preserve.

As adult landowners, my husband and I kept property lists – not only plants, but also birds and other wildlife. Each year brought change: new species in, old species out. Some species would increase, others decline or show up in new locations. Our observations taught us about the local habitats. Yellow star-grass (*Hypoxis hirsuta*) and Indian cucumber (*Medeola virginiana*) grace the tops of our west facing slopes. Shooting star (*Primula meadia*) and dainty rue anemone (*Thalictrum thalictroides*) thrive on the same slopes but slightly farther down. The bottoms are hotbeds of wild leek (*Allium burdickii*) in early spring. To our amazement, the leeks have the curious habit of flowering in the

Footsteps — continued on page 15